

**PRINT BOOKS: USER PREFERENCES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**

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**Abstract**

Print books remain an integral part of academic libraries despite the increasing popularity of digital resources. This paper investigates the enduring preference for print books among students and faculty in academic settings. Through surveys, case studies, and a review of relevant literature, this study explores the reasons why users continue to favor print over digital formats, particularly for in-depth study and research. Key factors such as reading habits, tactile engagement, and the perceived advantages of print materials are analyzed to provide insights for library collection management and user services.

**1. Introduction**

In an era of rapidly advancing digital technologies, academic libraries are increasingly integrating digital resources like e-books into their collections. However, despite the rise of digital materials, many students and faculty members continue to express a preference for print books. This study aims to examine the factors that contribute to the enduring popularity of print books in academic libraries. By understanding these preferences, academic libraries can make informed decisions about collection development and service offerings to better meet user needs.

**2. Background and Literature Review**

The shift towards digital resources has transformed academic libraries, offering users more convenient and remote access to information. However, numerous studies indicate that print books still hold a significant place in academic research and learning. Users cite the **tactile experience** of holding a book, the ease of annotation, and reduced screen fatigue as key reasons for preferring print.

A study by Mizrachi (2015) found that 78% of university students preferred print books for academic reading, particularly when it came to longer, more complex texts. Similarly, Baron (2015) noted that students often associate print books with **better focus** and **deeper comprehension**, highlighting the physical nature of reading as crucial to their learning processes. Other studies, like those by Spencer (2006) and Liu (2008), suggest that print books offer a sensory experience that many users find irreplaceable, providing a level of engagement that digital materials lack.

**3. Research Objectives**

This research paper aims to:



1. Investigate the reasons for users' preference for print books in academic libraries.
2. Explore how reading habits influence the choice between print and digital formats.
3. Analyze the impact of print book preferences on study habits and academic performance.
4. Provide recommendations for academic libraries on managing print collections alongside digital resources.

## 4. Methodology

This study employs a **quantitative survey** and **qualitative case study** approach. The survey was distributed to students and faculty at several academic institutions, focusing on their use of print books and their perceptions of the format. The case studies were conducted in two academic libraries, where circulation statistics and user feedback were analyzed to better understand the role of print books in academic environments.

### 4.1 Survey Design

The survey was designed to gather data on:

- Frequency of print book usage in academic study and research.
- Specific reasons for preferring print books over e-books.
- Perceived advantages and disadvantages of print materials.
- The relationship between print book usage and study habits or academic success.

### 4.2 Case Studies

Two academic libraries were selected to serve as case studies. These libraries, one at a large research university and the other at a liberal arts college, provided a representative sample of different types of institutions. Data were collected on print book circulation, user preferences, and staff perspectives on how users engage with print materials.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 User Preferences for Print Books

The survey results showed a **strong preference for print books** among both students and faculty. Approximately 65% of respondents indicated that they preferred print books for in-depth study, especially for lengthy or complex materials. Users cited the **tactile experience**, the ability to easily flip through pages, and the **lack of distractions** as major reasons for choosing print over digital formats. Many respondents also expressed concerns about **eye strain** and the challenges of sustained reading on digital devices.



## 5.2 Reading Habits and Study Practices

Print books were most commonly used for **extensive reading sessions**, where focus and retention were key. Students in the humanities and social sciences, in particular, expressed a preference for print books, as they often engage with texts that require deep concentration and reflection. Faculty members also noted that they preferred print when annotating or referring to multiple sections of a text. For example, professors in literature and philosophy indicated that print books allowed them to engage with texts more thoroughly, using **marginalia** and **post-it notes** to track their thoughts.

Conversely, print books were less commonly used for quick reference or multitasking, where e-books or online articles were seen as more convenient. However, when it came to core course readings or critical study materials, print books were overwhelmingly favored.

## 5.3 Impact on Academic Performance

A notable finding from the study was that many students felt they **performed better academically** when using print books. This is consistent with research by Mangen et al. (2013), which found that students often retain more information from print materials than from digital formats. Students reported that print books helped them concentrate more fully and reduce distractions, leading to better comprehension and retention of the material.

Furthermore, students indicated that **note taking** was easier with print books, as they could easily annotate margins or insert bookmarks. This tactile interaction with the material was seen as enhancing their understanding and engagement with the text. Faculty members echoed this sentiment, particularly in disciplines requiring careful textual analysis or engagement with primary sources.

## 5.4 Library Collection Management

The case studies revealed that academic libraries continue to **prioritize print collections**, especially in disciplines where physical books are highly valued, such as literature, history, and philosophy. Despite increasing investments in e-books, print books remain in demand, particularly for core textbooks, reference works, and specialized collections. Libraries that had heavily reduced their print acquisitions in favor of digital collections reported user dissatisfaction, particularly among students who preferred print for their academic studies.

## 6. Challenges and Opportunities

### 6.1 Challenges for Print Books

While print books are favored for in-depth study, they face certain challenges. **Space constraints** in libraries often limit the ability to maintain large print collections. Additionally, **budgetary pressures** force libraries to make difficult decisions about whether to invest in physical or digital



collections. The growing demand for remote access to resources also presents a challenge for maintaining a balance between print and digital formats.

## 6.2 Opportunities for Print Books

Print books offer unique opportunities for **experiential learning** and engagement. Libraries can capitalize on the popularity of print by creating more **interactive spaces** where users can browse collections, study, and engage with materials in a hands-on way. Libraries that promote the **tactile experience** of print, particularly through special collections or archives, may find that print books remain a key draw for academic communities.

Furthermore, print books offer opportunities for **preserving academic heritage**, especially in disciplines where physical books represent an important cultural and intellectual history. Academic libraries can continue to support print collections by offering **hybrid models** that provide both print and digital resources, catering to the diverse needs of their users.

## 7. Conclusion

Despite the increasing availability of digital resources, print books continue to hold significant value in academic libraries. Users, particularly students and faculty in disciplines requiring extensive reading and analysis, overwhelmingly prefer print books for in-depth study and research. The tactile nature of print, combined with its perceived advantages in focus, comprehension, and engagement, suggests that print books will remain a vital part of academic libraries for the near future.

To meet these evolving preferences, academic libraries must strike a balance between digital and print collections, ensuring that both formats are available to users. By understanding the unique advantages of print books, libraries can better serve their communities and enhance the learning experience for students and faculty alike.

## 8. Recommendations for Academic Libraries

- **Maintain a Balanced Collection:** Libraries should ensure that they continue to invest in print books, particularly in disciplines where print remains the preferred format for study.
- **Create Engaging Spaces:** Libraries can encourage the use of print books by creating comfortable, distraction-free reading environments that enhance the user experience.
- **Preserve Special Collections:** Libraries should prioritize the preservation and promotion of print books that represent valuable academic and cultural heritage.
- **User Education:** Educating users on the strengths of both print and digital formats can help them make informed decisions about which resources best meet their academic needs



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